

Emotions behind the words: A Review paper on Transgender Literature critically analyzed through Narratology and Narrative Element

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Abstract

This research explores the narratological elements and narrative styles in transgender literature, aiming to shed light on the lived experiences of a marginalized community. Transgender individuals, often excluded from fundamental human rights such as housing, health care, education, and social respect, endure systemic discrimination that severely impacts their mental health and social standing. Transgender literature serves as a powerful medium for expressing these experiences, where their stories of resilience, trauma, identity, and personal growth are articulated through various narrative techniques. This study delves into the thematic and structural aspects of transgender narratives, examining how elements such as voice, perspective, and chronology represent the complexity of transgender lives. Through the lens of narratology, the research investigates how transgender authors utilize these elements to reflect their unique psychological and emotional landscapes while challenging societal norms and reclaiming identity. By analyzing diverse works within this body of literature, the study identifies key narrative strategies that help convey the depth of transgender experiences, emphasizing the importance of these narratives in fostering greater understanding and empathy toward this marginalized community. This research thus contributes to the broader discourse on gender, identity, and social justice in literary studies.

Keywords: Transgender literature, narratology, marginalization, identity, narrative techniques.

Introduction

Transgender individuals in India face significant marginalisation and alienation within society. Often unheard and underestimated, they are frequently subjected to torment, abuse, and trauma. Despite these challenges, transgender people possess a rich linguistic and cultural heritage, with their distinct language, diction, style, and emotions. However, society largely fails to recognise their contributions and struggles. Transgender narratives in India have started gaining visibility, offering a powerful voice for their pain and experiences. These narratives not only reflect the lived realities of transgender individuals but also serve as a form of resistance against the societal norms that marginalise them. The stories they share—through literature, art, and other mediums—challenge traditional gender roles and push for greater understanding and acceptance.

Objectives

This review article explores the untapped potential within transgender literature in India. It aims to shed light on the diverse and complex experiences of transgender people that remain primarily unexamined in mainstream discourse. By highlighting these narratives through analysis of Narratology and Narrative Elements in Transgender literature, the article seeks to broaden the scope of literary studies and encourage more inclusive representation in Indian literature, ultimately fostering a more equitable society. It aims to understand Transgender Literature and further attempts to get into the specific narrative elements like Conflict and Style to assess Transgender literature and literary styles.

Methodology

This review adopts a qualitative methodology centred on textual analysis to explore transgender literature through narratology and narrative techniques critically. The data has been gathered from various online sources, including peer-reviewed research articles, autobiographies, and relevant news articles, to provide a comprehensive foundation for analysis. Key narrative elements such as point of view, characterisation, narrative time, and plot structure are scrutinised to examine how transgender identities are constructed and represented in literature. Particular focus is placed on how transgender authors and narratives featuring transgender characters disrupt traditional gender norms, reclaim agency, and challenge heteronormative conventions. By comparing diverse works of fiction, memoirs, and autobiographies, the study highlights the socio-political contexts and intersections of race, class, and sexuality that further shape these narratives. Through careful interpretation, this review aims to provide a deeper understanding of how transgender literature reflects lived experiences and contributes to a broader literary discourse on gender identity, ultimately offering new insights into the complexities of identity and representation.

Discussion and Results

Transgenders are those whose gender identity does not match with their biological sex. “Transgender is the state of one’s “gender identity” not matching one’s “assigned sex” (Golden Kisha). Gender nonconformity leads them towards mockery, discrimination, violence, and deteriorated conditions. Transgenders were well-treated in the courts of the Mughals. “Hijras were considered clever, trustworthy and fiercely loyal and had free access to all spaces and sections of the population, thereby playing a crucial role in the politics of empire building in the Mughal era” (Michelraj). “At present, it is a ubiquitous sight in Indian railways and at many traffic signals of metropolitan cities or towns – that a group of transgenders, or hijras, clad in traditional sarees or churidars, aggressively begging from the people clapping their hands and blessing those who offer them money and cursing those who deny. It is believed that their touch pollutes and their curses come true” (Dasari and Reddy 8). In their research paper, Dasari and Reddy sketch a picture of a banal Indian scene where railways, Traffic Signals, and so on are places where TGs can easily be spotted begging and eliciting money from others under the pretext of curses or blessings. Since they are marginalised and criminalised, job opportunities for them are a matter of superficiality for others and, thus, go undiscussed. The Trans Narratives are eventful, emotional, and vivid.

The Narratives of Transgender

Narratology and Narratives

The study of narrative, as put forward by Fludernik (2006), is narrative theory. Narrative theory, or narratology, is the study of narrative as a genre. Its objective is to describe “the constants, variables, and combinations typical of narrative and to clarify how these characteristics of narrative texts connect within the framework of theoretical models (typologies) (Fludernik)” The general idea we get from these definitions is that narratology studies the formal features of a narrative. Prince (1982), for instance, defines it as: “the study of the form and functioning of narrative” (Prince 7). This term is moreover defined by Meister (2009) as a “humanities discipline” that is dedicated to “the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation” (Hühn et al. 329).

Considering the origin and roots of ‘narratology’ in its name and discipline, Prince explains that though the term narratology is new, the discipline and what they do in it are not new. Still, it goes back to Plato and Aristotle (1982). However, as a discipline, Jahn explains, narratology started to take form in 1966, and this was the time when the French journal *Communications* published a relevant issue with the title “The Structural Analysis of Narrative” (Manfred). Jahn explains that just three years later, Tzvetan Todorov coined the term ‘narratology’ to refer to the theory of narrative structures. This was when a narratologist aimed to describe and investigate the structural properties of a narrative. This is called “dissecting the narrative phenomenon into its parts” and attempting to determine its functions and relationships (Genette).

Narrative Elements

Conflict

“Conflict refers to the issue or problem characters in a story are confronted by. The narrative is structured around how the characters face the conflict. The four general types of conflicts are: i) person vs. person (a couple going through a divorce); ii) person vs. self (protagonist wrestling with depression); iii) person vs. nature (protagonist trying to survive a natural disaster); and iv) person vs. society (protagonist fighting for civil rights). The interaction of character and conflict creates the central effect of the story and is the main indicator of meaning” (“Narrative Elements Explained”). When Manobi joined as the assistant professor, she was ostracized labeling her as odd by her colleagues. She recollects in her autobiography: “they were naturally stunned by my presence and openly declared war against me, threatening to ruin my career since no hijra had the right to become a professor!” (Bandyopādhyāya and Pandey 92). Here, Manobi faces some solemn troubles because of her joining as a professor. And she chose to fight back by being persistent in her job. The conflict occurs in the story namely Person vs. Society, where the protagonist fights for civil rights. In the 70s Hindi Cinema

showcased these conflicts in the movies and offered the term “Angry Young Man” for those protagonists. Likewise, Manobi fought and got her right in the end. The conflict type that occurs here is Person vs. self, in which the protagonist tussles with depression, anxiety, and traumatic experiences and is unable to make firm decisions. The shaky stance of one’s conscience can easily be perceived. However, Vidya’s resilience and willfulness were the key factors in overcoming this conflict. In her book, Vidya writes, “. . . I could not lead a double life any longer. No, I couldn’t live any longer as a man. If I could not become a woman, I’d rather die. I wasn’t confused now” (Living Smile Vidya).

Style

Style refers to how the writer uses language, including diction, voice, tone, sentence style, etc. Paying attention to these details allows the reader to identify how and why word choice, sentence style, etc., can help create the effect and meaning of the story (“Narrative Elements Explained”). On analysing the style factor in Transgender literature, it was observed that soft tones were present but in the form of tonal shifts in their dictions, signified impudence, stubbornness, anger, frustration, dejection, bliss, and so on. They use linguistic and para-linguistic elements profusely and effectively. In the article ‘*The Red Lipstick Monologue: Laxmi speaks her mind in her new book*’, published in The Hindu, dated Friday, Sep 02, 2022, where transgender activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi enthusiastically professes, “to me, the term ‘transgender’ has always implied ‘transcending gender’ — are considered misfits in society. We are termed ‘abnormal’ (“The Red Lipstick Monologue”).

Her remark on transgender is enthusiastic, positive, satiable, and striving. She professes that the Transgender Community is growing by leaps and bounds, evading thwarts from society and ill-wishers. Similarly, Living Smile Vidya gets herself mentally prepared by asserting, “I had come to a clear decision . . . My decision was firm, bold. I hated being a man. I was going to try and live as a woman. If I failed, I was ready to die” (Living Smile Vidya). In the above-quoted excerpt from her book, Vidya surpasses Hamlet in making decisions and audaciously chooses her true herself. Her adamant and sanguine attitudes and perspectives were rock-solid, which led her towards her ultimate goal, which was to achieve it at any cost. Eventually, she did so.

Narratological Assessment of Trans Narratives

The basic concept of narratology states that:

“Narratology can be considered based on two classifications introduced by Jahn. i.e. Discourse Narratology and Story Narratology.... Story Narratology, by contrast, focuses on the action units that 'emplot' and arrange a stream of events into a trajectory of themes, motives, and plot lines...” (Manfred).

And further

“Narrators may be overt or covert. An overt narrator refers to him/herself in the first person (‘I’, ‘we’ etc.), one who directly or indirectly addresses the narratee and one who offers reader-friendly exposition whenever it is needed. A covert narrator, contrast, is one who has a more or less neutral (nondistinctive) voice and style, one who is sexually indeterminate, ..., one who does not intrude or interfere, one who lets the story events unfold in their natural sequence and tempo” (Manfred).

“Narrators may be homodiegetic, autodiegetic, heterodiegetic. This classification is based on the narrator’s relationship to the story” (Genette). The narrator is within the level of action. There is another term for homodiegetic narrator, which is autodiegetic narrator, and which has the same meaning, but the only difference is that the narrator here is the protagonist. However, in a heterodiegetic narration, the story is told by a heterodiegetic narrator who is not present as a character in the story (Genette). The second subcomponent of narratology is focalisation or mood, which poses the question of “who sees?” vs. the question of “who speaks” (which is about narrators discussed earlier). Focalisation suggests that a specific narration or story is seen/told from whose perspective. In this respect, two terms are introduced: external focalisation and internal focalisation. External focalisation refers to “the candidate for a text’s perspectival orientation who is the narrator”. Internal focalisation is when the narrative events are “presented from a character’s point of view” (Manfred). Thus, Transgender literature, which comes under autobiographies, can be analysed with the above-quoted grounds. Their literature comes under the story narration type: an overt narrator narrates the course of action, an autodiegetic narrator is there as the writer/narrator himself is the protagonist. At the same time, Internal Focalization is present there as it is presented from a character’s point of view.

Conclusion

The review of the research puts forward some key points that the study found. Transgender are deprived of social, personal, and professional space and privileges by dichotomy. They have been tormented and suppressed. Since they have to emerge

and prove themselves that they have the capabilities to be in the mainstream. Regarding conflict in Trans Narratives, this study found both personal conflict for realisation and identity and social conflict for dignity, self-respect, social space, and acceptability. Style and diction have different emotional shades, such as impudence, stubbornness, anger, frustration, dejection, bliss, etc. They use narrative elements profusely and effectively to express themselves, yet it puts forth their literary erudite.

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